Private FBI File Held 'Sensitive' Information

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During Dwight D. Eisenhower's tenure in the White House the FBI secretly compiled allegations that he was having extramarital affairs, according to information contained in a private file maintained by a chief assistant to the late FBI director J. Edgar Hoover.

Nearly 5,000 documents from the file of the late Louis B. Nichols, who was assistant FBI director under Hoover, were released recently by the bureau under a Freedom of Information Act request by Athan Theoharis, a historian at Marquette University in Milwaukee.

The file also documents FBI break-ins and efforts to collect allegations of personal misconduct by public officials.

Theoharis said yesterday that Nichols' "official and confidential" file was begun in 1941 to gather information of a "sensitive" nature that Hoover was interested in and did not want included in the agency's official files.

In addition to pursuing allegations about Eisenhower's love life, the file shows that the FBI, at the request of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, investigated rumors that his predecessor, Herbert Hoover, had contact with the Nazi-controlled Vichy government of France during Roosevelt's term.

The investigation, which produced no evidence, occurred as Roosevelt was preparing to run for a third term. Herbert Hoover was a vocal critic of Roosevelt's foreign policy.

The rationale for the investigation given by the Roosevelt White House was that contact with the Vichy government would be an unwarranted intrusion into foreign affairs. But, Theoharis said, the probe also was an attempt to use the FBI's powers for political purposes.

Papers Outline Bureau Break-Ins, Two Love Affairs for Eisenhower

Other documents from J. Edgar Hoover's confidential file obtained by Theoharis and outlined in the current issue of U.S. News & World Report show similar efforts by Roosevelt and other presidents to use the FBI for purposes having nothing to do with national security.

The Nichols file also provides further examples of efforts by Hoover and his FBI associates to collect potentially embarrassing information about public officials.

Documents in the file show that the FBI broke into the New York offices of the American Youth Congress in 1942 and photocopied correspondence between Eleanor Roosevelt and officials of the left-wing organization.

Theoharis said the file does not make clear whether the break-in was authorized or done illegally simply to obtain Roosevelt's letters. After receiving information about the letters, Hoover had a report prepared on the substance of the correspondence,

# of Interest to Hoover

Theoharis said. That report is not contained in the file.

"The bureau conducted break-ins and targeted left-wing organizations for break-ins to obtain membership lists, subscription lists and minutes of meetings," he said. "It's conceivable that's why they were breaking in.

It's not clear that they were going after her letters."

In the Eisenhower case, the Nichols file shows that in 1955 the FBI was given information purporting to link Eisenhower to Kay Summersby, an aide to Eisenhower during World War II.

According to documents reviewed by Theoharis, a former FBI agent who was an aide to then-Sen. Joseph R. McCarthy (R-Wis.) approached the FBI with information that Summersby, who was married and a resident of New York, spent several months at the Shoreham Hotel here so that she and Eisenhower could continue meeting.

Theoharis said the agency contacted sources at the Shoreham and called Summersby's home in New York to find out whether the allegation was true but could not substantiate it.

In a second case, the FBI picked up information from a wiretap that tied Eisenhower to the wife of a counsel for the General Services Administration.

In the wiretap of suspected mobster John Vitali, an associate told him that the GSA counsel had a pretty wife and that Eisenhower was interested in her.

Theoharis said it is not clear what the FBI did with this information, except note it in Nichols' file.